

The Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire: A Process Feedback Application in an Elementary School

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The current influence of "systems theory" with its attendant conceptual if not operational vocabulary such as input, output, feedback and recycle has focused increased attention upon the information base available for decision-making in organizations. Efforts to utilize in schools the developments in systems thinking from management and the behavioral sciences have intensified an awareness of the inadequacy of our data base for educational decision-making at all levels from kindergarten to graduate school. It is the purpose of this article to discuss the utilization of a research based instrument, the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ)* as a key information retrieval-feedback procedure by an elementary school faculty in its program of continuous professional development. Emphasis will be upon the types of information provided by the OCDQ with multiple implications for decision-making in staff and program development endeavors.

The OCDQ was developed in a continuation of the situational approach to leader behavior which Halpin had investigated in earlier work with the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire during the Ohio State Leadership Studies. The OCDQ study grew out of the intuitive notion that there are differences in climates between and among schools, and that these differences can be sensed as one moves from school to school. In broad terms, Halpin and Croft were attempting to establish for the school organization a means of

determining the climate, which is somewhat analogous to the attempts to establish personality measures in regard to individual behavior. In discussing their work, the researchers pointed out that they were mapping roughly the same domain of inquiry that other investigators have described as morale, but that they were seeking to conceptualize or map this domain in a way which would provide more heuristic value to the concept.

The questionnaire consists of 64 items that may be used to establish the organizational climate as perceived by the members of the school's staff. The items are answered on a four-point, forced-choice scale. The OCDQ provides eight subtest or dimension scores, four of which describe the perceived teachers' behavior: Disengagement, Indifference, Esprit and Intimacy, and four of which provide dimensions of the principal's behavior as it is perceived by the members of his teaching staff: Aloofness, Production Emphasis, Thrust and Consideration.

These subtest scores are utilized through the development of a profile which classifies the organizational climate of the school on a continuum from Open to Closed. The climate continuum has six possible classifications: Open, Autonomous, Controlled, Familiar, Paternal and Closed, which move from the desired and hypothesized effective Open Climate at one end to the less desirable Closed Climate at the other end.

An ERIC search with an organizational climate descriptor will reveal readily the extent to which the OCDQ has been embraced by the educational research community. Little reference will be found, however, to its operationalized use as a part of information processing systems which focus upon the individual school as the basic unit of educational change and development.

The opportunity to work with an elementary school in an operational use of the OCDQ developed from a continuing consultant relationship with the school. Informal dialogue with the principal, centering around a need for more information upon which to base organizational decisions, led to discussions of the OCDQ. Armed with limited preliminary information, the principal discussed with the faculty the possibility of utilizing the OCDQ. Agreement was reached to proceed, and the members of the faculty responded to the OCDQ at a subsequent meeting. To insure the anonymity of individual respondents, the faculty members individually assigned a four digit code number to their answer sheets which became the basis for information feedback.

A subsequent component of an inservice day was set aside for the consultant to meet with the faculty to discuss the instrument in more detail, to

*A.W. Halpin and D.B. Croft, *Organizational Climate of Schools*. Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, University of Chicago, 1963.

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provide individual and school feedback data and to respond to needs for clarification. Caution was exercised by the consultant not to become involved in judgmental or inferential discussions.

The basic format for providing data feedback to individuals included frequency counts by response possibilities by items grouped according to the eight dimensions. Selected items from the Thrust dimension are provided for illustrative purposes.

1. No Response
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Frequently
5. Very Often

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1. The principal sets an example by working hard himself. | 2 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 21 |
| 2. The principal uses constructive criticism. | 1 | 0 | 9 | 11 | 9 |
| 3. The principal tells teachers of new ideas he has run across. | 0 | 1 | 3 | 16 | 10 |

While item-by-item analysis techniques must be viewed with a degree of caution, the ability of the individual to study each item and locate his response to that item relative to the faculty responses seems to be a powerful introspective procedure.

A second presentation format included individual and school scores on the eight dimensions. Two contrasting illustrative examples are given below.

| Dimensions | School | X ₁ | X ₂ |
|---------------------|--------|----------------|----------------|
| Disengagement | 40 | 39 | 46 |
| Hindrance | 56 | 57 | 65 |
| Esprit | 50 | 48 | 38 |
| Intimacy | 50 | 60 | 52 |
| Aloofness | 33 | 33 | 37 |
| Production Emphasis | 49 | 49 | 54 |
| Thrust | 58 | 56 | 48 |
| Consideration | 61 | 55 | 56 |

The dimension scores are standardized to a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10, and have meaning according to the definition of the several dimensions. For example, a low score on Hindrance is desirable but a low score on Esprit or

Thrust would not be good. Considerable effort and time were devoted during the discussion period in attempting to secure agreement on the meaning of these scores. The prototypic profiles from Halpin and Crofts' original work were discussed at length.

Cursory study of the two illustrative cases provides examples of introspective possibilities provided by these data. X₁ seems to be fairly well in step with the school scores on all dimensions except Intimacy and Consideration. This faculty member apparently draws much higher social needs satisfaction from school based associations than do peers, and does not perceive the principal to be as considerate as do other faculty members. X₂ clearly seems to be one of a small minority which is out of step at the perceptual level at least with his colleagues.

The principal identified his scores on the summary sheet which had been provided for each staff member. This very open step by him allowed an individual for analytical purposes to observe the following data:

| Dimensions | School | Principal | X ₁ |
|---------------|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Disengagement | 40 | 43 | 39 |
| Hindrance | 56 | 60 | 57 |
| Esprit | 50 | 54 | 48 |
| Intimacy | 50 | 50 | 60 |
| Aloofness | 33 | 30 | 33 |
| Production | 49 | 53 | 49 |
| Thrust | 58 | 48 | 56 |
| Consideration | 61 | 61 | 55 |

It is worthy to note that in this particular school the principal and his collective staff were rather congruent in their perceptions. In fact, the principal saw himself in a slightly less favorable light than did his professional staff. The absence of such congruence in perceptions has been reflected in the literature with principals tending to view their schools through rose-colored glasses.

The principal, likewise, could reflect upon his perceptions as compared to those of the total staff and of the unidentified individuals which comprise his faculty. The observable central tendencies as well as the variations of perceptions reflected by these dimension scores and by the previously responded item-by-item frequency were data perceived by the principal as very useful.

Climate similarity scores which categorized the school in the Open classification were shared also. This aspect of the data was tempered with some of the continuing caution raised by Halpin and others that the climate continuum is not discretely defined except at the endpoints. The fact that this school is perceived as clearly Open probably says something about the willingness of

the faculty to venture forth with the OCDQ. Greater emphasis throughout the feedback session was placed at the item and dimension levels of analyses with particular stress upon the introspective possibilities ordered by these data.

Summarizing their earlier study, Halpin and Croft had pointed out their belief that the chief consequence of the research had been their identification of the importance of "authenticity" in organizational behavior which was characteristic of the Open Climate. The two concepts of Thrust, which measured an index of the authenticity of the principal, and Esprit, which provided an index of the authenticity of the group, were deemed of pivotal importance. They hypothesized that Thrust measured a combination of the two dimensions tapped by the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire. Esprit in their opinion was the best individual measure of group morale. They also advanced the possibility that the OCDQ might possibly provide a more suitable criterion for measuring school effectiveness than some of the criteria now in use. Certainly the Open Climate as defined in their study would not be an impediment to effective group behavior.

Useful information may be obtained from analysis of the dimension scores and climate similarity scores according to selected demographic characteristics of professional personnel. "Years in education" and "years at this school" were employed as analysis variables with these data. The results of these analyses revealed no significant difference in perceptions according to these key experience variables. These findings were reported to the faculty, as the similarity in perceptions across experience levels also provided a basis for introspective discussions.

Accepting the example set by the principal, sharing is taking place at the peer level and with the principal relative to the introspection process which has been underway. Faculty meeting time has been devoted to discussions generated by the relatively high Hindrance score (56) and recommendations are being formulated for system-level consideration which would contribute to a reduction of burdensome paperwork and related administrative demands upon the faculty. Healthy discussions at the several levels have been generated also by the average score (50) on the key Esprit dimension.

The feeling is widespread among the faculty that the OCDQ process has been helpful in focusing their continuous professional development efforts at the individual and school levels.

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